

## [Wadsworth Wilson]

March 23, [1938?]

Wadsworth Wilson, (White)

Watchman and Caretaker,

Adyleen G. Merrick, Writer.

Dudley W. Crawford, Reviser. Original Names Changed Names

Wadsworth Wilson Thaddeus Wilkes

Spartanburg S.C. Sparta, S.C.

George Dean Jim Beam

Mrs. Walker Mrs. Wilson

Cris Cannon Cid Crosson

Laurie Lula

Algie Alton

Tryon Tyden

Lake Lanier Lake Lance [?????]

Behind his house along the railroad tracks Thad Wilkes was planting a garden. Neat rows of cabbage plants and spring onions were already set and beginning to grow. While open furrows had been made further planting.

“Good morning,” he greeted , as he pushed his old garden hat far back on his head and mopped at the moisture gathered on his forehead and face. “Have you come to poke fun at me too about this garden making? Well set there on the wheel barrow if you are going to stay a spell, while I cover up these peas before the birds get them. [Bet?] you are laughing at me for trying another garden this year and the bad luck I had with it last season. It just seems like I got the urge to plant. I do, birds or not.

“Last year, fast as I'd put in the sweet corn and it got about three inches high something cut it off right to the ground. I came to find out it was the brown thrushes, and what in time do you think they was doing with my blades of corn? Made a nest! durned if they didn't! It beat all, with grass and things a plenty, those birds took a notion to take sweet corn blades for nest building. First one bird then another took notion to dig up or eat everything I planted, 'till finally I sent for a boy to come and shoot birds for a spell.

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“The lady across the way found out about this and here she came, 'Oh Mr. Wilkes, please don't kill the birds, they are such a joy to me, especially the brown thrushes, their morning and evening song is just beautiful. Just now they are building nests; one pair in the shrub just outside my window. Please, please don't have [they boy?] shoot and frighten them away, will you?'

“Well, I just scratched my head and I guess you know already the birds weren't shot and I never got no garden, to speak of either. Ain't women folks queer anyway? And now when I'm right busy trying to get ahead of the birds, while the winter visitors are still feeding them you come to ask questions.

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"No I wasn't born here, I didn't come until 1914. I was born on farm just outside of Sparta, S.C. in the spring of 1876, and I lived there with my Pa and Ma until I was nineteen. We had a real nice farm too. Pa and me cared for it. Fair days, when we were working in the bottom land near the river Ma would pack lunch for us and when noon came, we'd knock off and eat, then fish awhile and rest. Pa was in the Civil War, and he'd tell me all about his experiences while we were sitting on the river bank waiting for the fish to bite. Ma was an invalid and when she died it just looked like Pa didn't have the wish to live 3 no longer, they both went the same year. Pa made Sheriff Jim Beam our guardian and he came and got all our things and settled up for me; sold the house things and turned the farm back to the owners. He said he'd come back for me Sunday and take me home with him, but when noon came that day I left out to Sparta walking; I can remember to this day, how hot it was walking the railroad tracks and tired I was when I finally came to Sparta, it was about fifteen miles. I walked because money was scarce and I knew it was best to save what little cash Sheriff had turned over to me that day.

"It was plum dark when I got to Sparta and found a place to stay. I went to a Mrs. Wilson's and she gave me board for eight dollars a month, good board it was too. Mrs. Wilson wanted to know who I was and all about my troubles, she talked to me all the time I was eating the supper she [had?] set out for me on the kitchen table. Guess she knew I was feeling pretty blue and scared too. She was awful like Ma, and it was comforting to be there with her to help me get started for myself. We talked a long time after I'd finished supper; about what I was going to do and such. After awhile she took me up stairs to a room I was to share with some boys [and?] brought me a pail of hot water; she said I must 4 clean up good before I went to bed. Well I did. After I got in bed I lay there a long time thinking things over before I finally fell asleep. I don't believe many folks know just how a boy feels with his folks all gone and him facing the world alone. I reckon they'd be more helpful if they did. Sheriff Beam wanted me to come and live with them but Pa always said, 'make your own way boy, when I'm gone, don't never be beholding to anybody as long as you can help it.' I've had a heap of ups and downs but I've always tried to follow his plan.

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Can't say I've ever set the world on fire, but I've always made an honest living for me and mine and got along without asking for help.

"When morning came and Mrs. Wilson called me, seems like I couldn't get located at first. She just laughed and pretended not to notice my bewilderment and she says to me, 'boy if you mean to eat grits and gravy before you go out to get that job you said you were going to lookk for, you had better light out of that bed.'

"After breakfast I started out across the back lots towards where I could see the mill village and beyond it the stacks of the mills. The sun was just coming up and I felt right cheerful after a night's rest and a good breakfast. Seems like I'd sure get a 5 job. I wanted to get one awful bad and not have to stay with Sheriff Beam. I didn't know exactly [[?] [what?] a guardian was, but I did know it was something like a boss over you till you got to be a man for yourself, and I was afraid of him some how. I thought maybe if I could find work he wouldn't bother me, so when I got to the mill I talked mighty hard to the man they sent me to see. He said, 'boy, did you ever work in the mill before,' and I had to tell him no sir, but I ain't afraid to try. The Then he set back in his chair and laughed. 'Joe' he hollered, 'come here and get this green horn and see can he work, he says he aint afraid to try'.

"I was getting along all right too, when Sheriff Beam found me he said I could stay on at the mill if I wanted to but he'd rather I came home to live with them, said he felt responsible til I come of age, long as Pa had seen fit to have appointed my guardian and wanted I should be under his care. Sheriff was mighty good to me all the time I stayed with him. He treated me just like I was his own child. I helped him carry provisions from his farm, bout about three miles out of Sparta, to the jail— and to feed the prisoners twice a day. Sheriff gave me four dollars a month and my board. First time I got my money he asked me what I planned to do with my money, well I din't know exactly, 6 there wasn't much to spend it for. Sheriff said, 'Now put your money in the bank son against a rainy day' and he took we to the First National Bank, and I started a saving account. I've always been grateful to him for teaching me to save.

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"Soon after I went to live with Sheriff Beam, he made me a peace officer under him and I worked on that until I was elected to the Police force in Sparta [in?] 1905. It was while I was staying with Sheriff Beam that the Mayor of Sparta was murdered by a negro named Cid [Crosson?]. It caused an awful uproar too. Sheriff scattered his men and we searched for that boy till we finally found him late that night headed for the mountains across the state line into North Carolina. We kept him hid out because all night long a mob of people stayed around the jail waiting for us to bring him in. Next morning Sheriff had me to help stretch a hemp rope from the rafters in his barn and weight it down with a big rock. He let it hang there about three days to take all the give out of it. Then he told me to take it down, that it was ready to hang Cid with. I begged him to let me see the hanging which was going to take place at ten o'clock that day. Sheriff just studied me for awhile, than he told me, 'come on if you want to, hangings ain't no pleasant sights and by the time you've seen as [many?] as I have 7 you'll be begging me to send you in another direction.' I don't ever remember being as scared in all my life, before or since, nor any sicker. I've seen three men hang since then but nothing ever seemed as horrible to me as when they hung poor Cid. Sheriff felt mighty bad too when he saw how I took the hanging, but he said if I wanted to be an officer of the law I'd have to learn to take the bitter with the sweet.

"I got married along about that time. Lula was a mighty sweet, pretty girl, she still is to my notion. We had a little girl first , then a little boy came along three years later. Lula named him Alton part from fancy and part for me. He comes home every once in awhile and brings the family. He's got a girl and a boy as same as we had. I'd better make a garden and a good one too, Mother does herself proud when the boy comes home for a visit.

"In 1914 they sent for me to come here to Tyden as Chief of Police. I hated to leave Sparta, but a fellow has to better himself anytime he can. I'd saved enough money by then to buy this place and we've lived here ever since. I did all right till the night the County Sheriff asked me to help him run down a negro he was after. It was an awful cold night, ground all frozen, I didn't much want to go, but I always figure to be obliging when I can.

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We 8 went over to the negro church near the cemetery where we'd been tipped off we'd find him, and sure enough met him fair. Then the negro saw me he started to run and I struck out after him. I stepped in a hole and broke my ankle. That put me in the hospital for six weeks. After I went back to work I couldn't get around so [good?] my ankle was awful weak. One day the doctor says to me, 'Thad, you better hunt you another job, this being on your feet so much ain't good for that ankle, and besides folks are beginning to talk about the town keeping you on now that you can't get about good.'

"Well I had to quit. The town never did anything for me but I drew three hundred dollars compensation an I stayed at home all the summer just raising chickens and working in this same garden.

"When fall came I got a job as caretaker and watchman at Lake Lance and I been on that job ever since, about four years or more. Its pretty easy on me most of the time. I get right lonely night staying alone in that big old club house, but fishing is good and I have lots of time I can spend out on the lake. In the summer I have my hands full though, for about three months I don't see much rest. Me and the young life guards really put in time watching out for fools and drunks. Some days I make a raid with the revenue 9 men when a still is on the Lake property. But shucks! You can't stop these mountain people from stilling. There is going to be liquor made as long as branches run down hills! I've fought liquor all my life and all the officers in the world can't keep it down, long as folks craves their drinks any more than I can raise a garden with all these birds to eat it up."